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## **Enie Meeny Miney Mo!**

### **How to Try Flutes Galore at a Flute Convention**

#### **A Guide to Avoiding Complete Confusion!**

It is easy to become confused when you attend a flute convention because there are so many manufacturers and dealers who will have instruments on display. By following these guidelines, you can compare concrete differences between instruments and form a good outline. The Cincinnati Fluteworks' data pages entitled "*How to Shop for a Flute*" and "*Fraizing and Undercutting: How to Test a Flute*" are also helpful when comparing many different brands of instruments. Here are some other pointers which will help you compare flutes in a logical progression.

#### **Before the convention:**

If you *haven't* tried any flutes before the convention, be specific about what you would like in a new instrument. Have a budget and a list of specifications you would like on an instrument. It is also helpful to have a list of things you do not like about your flute written down before you start. It's great to try that 14K gold flute with the engraved keys, but you need to know which flutes you are going to seriously consider.

If you *have* tried instruments before you go to the convention, it will be helpful to write down what you about them. This will give you a good reference point when you try other makes of flutes. Take note of sound and response characteristics, the feel of the mechanism, and the flexibility of the sound. As you go from booth to booth, **write down** what you like and dislike about each make of flute you try. This will help you remember which flute is which!

#### **At the convention:**

##### **The construction of the flute:**

- Gently grasp each key and try to move it horizontally (left and right). A very good pre-professional or professional flute should not have any movement. (Some great student flutes are that good too!)
- Gently press a key down until it rests upon the tonehole, then gently press the key down as far as it will go. This will tell you how much "give" the pad has. Pads which have more give wear out much quicker than pads which do not.

### **Play testing instruments at booths and displays:**

- Start on A5 (the A just above the staff) and play long whole notes *without* vibrato up and down the chromatic scale. This will provide you with a general idea of the sound and blowing characteristics of that instrument. You will be able to eliminate many flutes immediately if they do not produce the sound you like!
- Next, try some tonguing exercises in all three ranges of the flute. It is important that all three ranges articulate and respond equally well.
- Now, you can eliminate your choices down to one or two instruments. Make arrangements with the exhibitors and try the instruments out of the exhibit hall where you will be able to hear the subtleties of the sound.

### **Play testing in private practice rooms:**

- First, run through the above tests again to acquaint yourself with the flutes.
- Then pick specific portions of pieces that will test the parameters of the instrument. Pick pieces which will test tonguing in the low register, pianissimo playing in the high register, rapid finger passages, large leaps, and any other specific strengths or weaknesses you may have. The “right flute for you” should improve your weaknesses more than it should accentuate your strengths.
- Now is the time to try different headjoints on the same flute body if there is something specific in the sound you would like to change. When trying a different head, take note of specific improvements and impairments of the sound. Trying extra headjoints without rhyme or reason will only confuse matters!
- You can finally eliminate all others and find *just the right flute for you!*

The main reason for shopping for a flute at a convention is to find the instrument that suits you best—not to have an exhibitor tell you which flute is for you. There are exhibitors who have a large selection of instruments to try and are willing to find a flute for each individual. These exhibits are the best place to start.

It's very helpful to bring along a note pad and write down what you discover about each instrument. Take note of what you are hearing—what you like and dislike. This will help take you through each step we described and give you something to consult when you are making your final decision. It's also helpful to bring a trusted friend or teacher along with you. Many times what you are hearing and what the audience hears can be two different things!

Too many people come to a convention and wander up and down the aisles playing the same excerpt—fast! - on every flute. Usually they end up confused and frustrated. The most important things to remember are to listen to the *specifics* of the flute sound, and take good notes. Don't be afraid to ask questions or ask for help. We always are happy to help in any way we can!